

TCD Political Science 8200: Dissertation and Dissertation Workshop
Department of Political Science, TCD
M.Sc. in International Politics
2022-2023

Times and Locations

Monday 25 April, Tuesday April 26, Wednesday April 27, Thursday April 28,
Tuesday May 3, Wednesday May 4, Thursday May 5,
Monday May 9, Tuesday May 10, Wednesday May 11, Thursday May 12

10am-12pm C6.002 (TRiSS Seminar Room) Arts Building

Liam Kneafsey (Dissertation Workshop Coordinator)
kneafsel@tcd.ie

Peter Stone
pstone@tcd.ie

Tom Paskhalis
tom.paskhalis@tcd.ie

Description:

Students are required to submit a dissertation of 10,000 words on a research question of their choice in international politics. This is your opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and skills you have developed over the past year. The dissertation should develop and display your ability to:

1. Identify a research question worthy of sustained scholarly attention.
2. Design a research plan appropriate to answering that question within given time and resource constraints.
3. Implement all stages of that research design independently, including the structured collection of new information, the application of appropriate analytical techniques, and the interpretation of the results.
4. Present the research in written form in a manner that withstands scrutiny.

General Advice:

We would advise you to think about the dissertation as writing a paper for an international peer-reviewed journal. The consequence of thinking about the dissertation in this way is that it directs you to selecting a well-defined and specific research question that has broad implications. The research question often identifies some important variation to be systematically described and explained. Such a formulation usually allows the researcher to identify and use relevant political science theories that offer explanations of the variation of interest.

A common format for your dissertation, and of course for journal articles, is:

- An introduction that states the research question and emphasises its social and scientific relevance. The variation to be explained, or 'dependent variable', should be clearly elaborated, and the puzzle situated in a scholarly literature.
- A theory section that discusses the relevant, sometimes competing, explanations of the phenomenon being examined. The theory section often presents specific expectations to be tested in the study.
- A research design section that justifies the selection of cases, choice of analytic method and any measurement decisions.
- An analysis section that presents the empirical findings and procedure through which these were derived.
- A conclusion that draws out the implications of the findings for the theories examined and for our broader understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

The material covered in PO8046 (Research Design A) and PO8047 (Research Design B) should be your main reference source of insights into how to formulate research questions and develop research plans. Although there are many, many well-written papers in political science, the following two papers – the first qualitative, the second quantitative – might serve as good examples for research paper organization:

Ziblatt, D. (2004). "Rethinking the Origins of Federalism: Puzzle, Theory, and Evidence from 19th Century Europe." *World Politics* 57: 70-98.

Copelovitch, M. (2010). "Master or Servant? Common Agency and the Political Economy of IMF Lending." *International Studies Quarterly* 54: 49-77.

Please treat this dissertation as if it were a submission to an academic journal. That means make sure it looks professional, with proper formatting, footnote, references, etc. For a guide to formatting, please consult the American Political Science Association's *Style Manual for Political Science*, which can be found here:

<https://mk0apsaconnectbvy6p6.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2018/11/Style-Manual-for-Political-Science-2018.pdf>

While students are welcome to use any citation system (Chicago, APA, etc.) they desire, so long as it is used consistently and provides the relevant information, any student unsure of what citation system to use is encouraged to use the system in the *Style Manual*.

The final dissertations should be double-spaced. Include a **word count** on the title page and include **page numbering** throughout. British or US English spellings are acceptable. Please include an abstract, maximum 200 words, at the start of the dissertation.

The best overall advice is that the more work you undertake at an earlier stage, the more you will benefit from, and enjoy, the process of writing your dissertation.

Assessment:

The dissertation is the sole basis of the assessment. The examiners are instructed to assess the dissertation according to the standards commonly used for peer-reviewed journals. In particular, examiners assess:

- the importance of the research question and the appropriateness of its formulation;

- the appropriateness of the evidence examined and the analytical tools brought to bear;
- the extent to which the interpretations and conclusions are justified on the basis of the analytical results; and
- the contribution that the dissertation makes to knowledge on the particular question it addresses.

Each dissertation will be marked by two examiners— normally your supervisor (barring unforeseen circumstances) and another member of staff at Trinity College (exceptionally, an academic staff member from another university). The external examiner will decide on any differences in marks given by the internal examiners and may, as with all work, revise the marks given by the internal examiners.

Schedule:

Please make note of the schedule below, as it contains a number of vitally important dates for you.

Dissertation Proposal Approval

By **Monday, 14 March**, please send a dissertation proposal to the course director (phelanw@tcd.ie) and to your supervisor. The proposal need not be long—250-500 words is fine, although it may be longer if you wish. Your proposal should indicate the following: 1) what research question you wish to answer, including an indication of the Dependent Variable; 2) why this question is significant; and 3) what methodology you propose to use to solve it (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, etc.). Both your supervisor and I must approve the proposal; if we have problems with it, we will work with you to get the project into shape.

The Dissertation Seminar

The dissertation seminar will be held on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday (excluding public holidays) over three weeks during Trinity Term (TCD's undergraduate examinations period)—**25 April through 12 May**. The dissertation seminar will run from 10am to 12pm and will be held in C6.002 (TRiSS Seminar

Room) in the Arts Building. At each seminar, there will be three or four student presentations. Each presentation will be followed by comments from a student discussant as well as discussion from the audience. The audience will consist of the entire class plus the instructors.

Each student will have approximate 30 minutes—10 minutes for the student's presentation, 4-6 minutes for comments from a discussant (who will be another student in the course), and the remaining time for general discussion. When you are presenting, please practice your presentation in advance so that it takes **no more** than 11 minutes. When you are acting as a discussant, please practice your comments in advance so that your comments take **no more** than 6 minutes. In each case, careful presentation and prioritization will help you.

You will receive your assignments both as presenter and as discussant well in advance of the seminar. Please note that if you wish to serve as presenter and/or discussant on another date, you may swap with another student. But **no** such swap is official until you have submitted it to the Workshop Coordinator Liam Kneafsey by email and he has approved it.

If you are presenting, be sure to cover the following questions. (Your answers, and even your formulation of the questions, may of course vary depending on how far you are with your research.):

1. What is your research question? What is the problem you are trying to solve? This will most likely involve the "variation to be explained"—the dependent variable that the dissertation will examine. Please be as specific as possible.
2. Why is this research question significant? Why should we care? Please do not assume that the answer will be obvious.
3. What have scholars said about this problem before? This will probably mean talking about what independent variables have been linked to the dependent variable, and why.

4. What is your contribution? What are you adding to the discussion of this research problem that has not been added before? How does your approach to the dependent variable add to the existing literature?
5. Are there alternative explanations to consider? What independent variables do they involve? Will you be considering them?
6. How will you go about demonstrating that your solution to the problem is correct? What evidence or argument will you produce to support that solution? Will it involve quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, or both? And what sources of data will you be using? Again, details are very helpful.
7. What findings, if any, do you have at this stage?
8. What tasks will you have to complete in order to finish the dissertation? Again, be as specific as possible.
9. Are there any specific aspects of your project on which you would particularly like feedback from the class? This is your golden opportunity!

It is very important that you post a **one-page summary** of your work in progress **at least three days** prior to the seminar. Please post this summary in the Discussion Board of the Blackboard page for the dissertation seminar. The Discussion Board can be found in the “Presentations” page under “Dissertation Proposals.” Posting in a timely fashion will allow everyone in attendance—**especially your discussant**—to prepare for your presentation and offer useful feedback.

You may (but are not required to) use PowerPoint slides to structure your presentation. (Most students have done so in the past.) If so, you should provide copies of your slides to your discussant in advance as well. Please note that it is common for students to try to present too many slides, so think carefully about how many you need.

The discussants are expected to provide constructive feedback on each of these points, where relevant. Discussants are expected to formulate specific questions and comments to inform the subsequent discussion and to help the presenter move forward with the research.

You are of course required to attend every seminar regardless of whether you are assigned a formal role as presenter or discussant. This requirement is for the benefit of other students and for yourself, since other students will be facing the same issues as you. We expect all participants to contribute every week.

Supervisor Feedback

You should aim to have a completed draft of your dissertation to your supervisor by **27 May**. This will give you plenty of time in June, July and the first part of August to revise and improve the draft. You are expected to work full time on your dissertation project throughout this period. If you are unable to achieve a complete draft by this time, don't panic—it will still be possible for you to complete the dissertation on time, but you will have much more work to do. But by 27 May, you definitely want to be at a point where you know just what you have to do to get the dissertation done in time.

Please work closely with your supervisor to make sure that your project is in shape for this deadline. Your work with your supervisor should be completed by **Friday 27 May**. Your supervisor is under no obligation to provide further assistance after that date. The dissertation should be an independent piece of work. It is therefore not appropriate to expect staff to comment on a sequence of drafts prior to final submission.

Submitting the Dissertation

On or before midnight on **Monday 15th August 2022**, please submit your final dissertation in the following two formats:

1. Submit one copy electronically via Turnitin. You should use the Turnitin page for the dissertation seminar Blackboard page.
2. Submit two hard copies in the department mailboxes, one to your dissertation supervisor and one to the course director William Phelan (**two** to your course director if he is also your dissertation supervisor). If you are hand delivering them, make sure you give yourself enough time to make it to the department office, as it

will close early on that date. If you are not in College, you may post two copies to the departmental office with instructions on who is to receive them. The envelope should be postmarked 15 August or earlier. Do not bind the hard copies in any fancy way, but each copy should be stapled together.

As stated in the M.Sc. Course Handbook, dissertations will not be accepted after the deadline without a valid reason. If a student misses the dissertation deadline, the student must appeal to the Course Director for permission to submit the dissertation. Permission will only be granted in the case of a valid medical certificate or documentation of other serious concern. A dissertation submitted after the deadline unexcused cannot receive a mark higher than a pass, and may be deemed a “fail” due to late submission. Note that late submission of dissertations may also prevent students from graduating in December with many of their colleagues.

Word count: The dissertation should be 10,000 words long, maximum, all included – that is to say, including bibliography, title page, abstract, tables, any appendices (if necessary) and any other words submitted as part of the dissertation. As stated above, the title page of the dissertation should include a declaration word count. Dissertations longer than the required maximum of 10,000 words may incur a mark penalty for excessive length.